

Program Notes & Song Texts

Bentley Roses

In 2002, the professor of flute at Bowling Green State University, in Ohio, Judith Bentley, decided to retire from a distinguished career. I had the pleasure of being one of Mrs. B's students from 1981-1986, and I consider her one of my most influential composition teachers...indeed, she is one of those teachers who gives more than just lessons on a given instrument, she teaches about life, balancing a career, and how to be a professional. But she contributed to the music world in so many different ways: her students have gone on to excel in many different aspects of music, from principal positions in major orchestras, to owning one of the most distinguished piccolo companies in the world.

So as her retirement neared, her current and former students decided to commission a new work in her honor. We decided an appropriate work would incorporate the flute, have a vocal part for her daughter, Julia Bentley (a wonderful mezzo, who has sung for Network for New Music), and be accompanied by piano. We used texts by one of Mrs. B's favorite poets, James Whitcomb Riley, from Indiana, the state where she grew up. And I decided, while pouring through this poet's works, that I would select several poems that focused on roses, since this would be a bouquet, given by her students; and thus the piece is named in her honor.

This work was premiered on May 4, 2002, in Bowling Green, Ohio, in a surprise concert, where all of her students returned and put on a full recital in Mrs. Bentley's honor.

--Jennifer Higdon

The Rose

It tossed its head at the wooing breeze;
And the sun, like a bashful swain,
Beamed on it through the waving trees
With a passion all in vain, --
For my rose laughed in a crimson glee,
And hid in the leaves in wait for me.

The honey-bee came there to sing
His love through the languid hours,
And vaunt of his hives, as a proud old king
Might boast of his palace-towers:
But my rose bowed in a mockery,
And hid in the leaves in wait for me.

The humming-bird, like a courtier gay,
Dipped down with a dalliant song,
And twanged his wings through the roundelay
Of love the whole day long:
Yet my rose turned from his minstrelsy
And hid in the leaves in wait for me.

The firefly came in the twilight dim
My red, red rose to woo --
Till quenched was the flame of love in him
And the light of his lantern too,
As my rose wept with dewdrops three
And hid in the leaves in wait for me.

And I said: I will cull my own sweet rose --
Some day I will claim as mine
The priceless worth of the flower that knows
No change, but a bloom divine --

The bloom of a fadeless constancy
That hides in the leaves in wait for me!

But time passed by in a strange disguise,
And I marked it not, but lay
In a lazy dream, with drowsy eyes,
Till the summer slipped away,
And a chill wind sang in a minor key:
Where is the rose that waits for thee?

I dream to-day, o'er a purple stain
Of bloom on a withered stalk,
Pelted down by the autumn rain
In the dust of the garden-walk,
That an Angel-rose in the world to be
Will hide in the leaves in wait for me.

To the Roses

I Dream that you are kisses Allah sent
In Forms material, that all the earth
May taste of you and guess of Heaven's worth,
Since it can waste such sweetness with content,--
Seeing you showered o'er the Battlement--
By Angel-hands plucked ripe from lips of mirth
And flung in lavish clusters, yet no dearth
Of rapture for the Anthem!...I have bent
Above you, nestled in some low retreat,
Pressing your velvet mouths against the dust,
And, ever nurturing this old conceit,
Have lifted up your lips in perfect trust
Against my mouth, nor found them the less
sweet
For having kissed the dust beneath my feet.

Rhythms from the North Country

Rhythms from the North Country for solo piano is structured by a clear and icily-stark harmonic framework. Against this simple background, various performance possibilities are explored -- strumming of strings, tapping of the lid and a finger tremolo on the side of the piano. The piece is athletic, unusual, and playful as it uses the piano lid, sides, and strings as percussion instruments of their own. The "north country" referred to in the title is the state of Vermont, the composer's home for the past many years.
Notes by the composer and Carson Cooman

American Waters

American Waters explores bodies of water as literal and metaphorical barriers between us and the places and people we know and love. As a nation of immigrants, our histories are rich with stories of family coming to the United States across oceans or traveling from one side of this continent to another. My great-grandparents emigrated to the U.S. from Ireland, leaving family and friends behind, and my own career has taken me to regions far from my native waters of Puget Sound. This piece digs into the emotional toll of these moves through the lens of water.

I created the text for this piece by stitching together fragments of folk songs from the U.S. and the United Kingdom. These fragments are like hints of memories from the past which are reinvented with new melodic lines. Whispered sounds emulate the noises of splashing surf and crashing waves.

My Bonnie
Away you rolling river
I cannot cross
Build me a boat
I cannot cross o're you rolling river
Down by the river
Down the sea
Over
Away
I'm bound away
Bound gently down
Across
Over the ocean

Bokeh for alto flute and piano

Bokeh: [BOH-Kay] n.
The aesthetic quality of the blur produced in out-of-focus parts of an image, caused by the "Circles of Confusion." Bokeh is the warm, circular glow given off by out of focus lights, as seen in many beautiful rainy-day pictures of traffic, busy city streets, and park lanterns.

Bokeh, for alto flute and piano, was commissioned by two very wonderful friends and supporters of my music, Hal Ide and Richard Gloss. The sentiment behind the piece is of sincere connection between the two performers, coming together to create music in conversation with each other. I wanted to evoke a sense of capriciousness in both parts to emulate a communal joy, while creating a warm sonic environment that both performers could find shelter within. Looking at images of "bokeh" brought sense of nostalgia for the cozy days that only stormy weather can bring; of gentle rain, a warm home, a cup of tea/coffee, and staring out the window without a sense of lost time or urgency.

Stranger, You Delighted Me

I have always been fascinated by animal life. I respect their strength and adaptations, which in so many areas dwarf our own human skill set. I feel a deep empathy for their intelligence, their relationships, their life cycles, and see many similarities between the human animal and our fellow creatures. Yet there remains something alien: I can never truly understand what it is like to walk through the world from their

perspective. These songs invite listeners to slip inside the skin of the stranger, to see the world through wilder eyes, and to appreciate the mysterious and beautiful differences between the human and the animal.

1. Little Fish

The tiny fish enjoy themselves
in the sea.
Quick little splinters of life,
their little lives are fun to them
in the sea.

2. Leopard

Gentle hunter
his tail plays on the ground
while he crushes the skull.
Beautiful death
who puts on a spotted robe
when he goes to his victim.
Playful killer
whose loving embrace
splits the antelope's heart.

Zephyros for solo flute

ZEPHYROS (Zephyrus) was the god of the west wind. In this piece, you can hear the various wind characteristics with the different flute effects and extended techniques. This piece received Honorable Mention of the 2022 solo Flute Category of the Flute New Music Consortium Composition Competition.

American City

Zaimont's first multi-movement composition, written at age 12, showcases a portrait of New York City with tempos that range from fast and springy to lilting and quite slow. The five original movements appear here almost entirely as first composed, and are now followed by a new sixth movement, inviting the toccata finale to dash headlong to a firm close.

–Subito Music

Seal Mother

In Celtic and Norse mythology, selkies are magical beings that can change from seal to human form by shedding their sealskins. Selkie tales often feature a human man stealing and hiding a woman selkie's sealskin, trapping her in human form, marrying her, and starting a family. When she finally finds her skin, she is compelled to return to her ocean home, but in so doing, she leaves her children behind. I grew up near Washington State's Puget Sound waters, where harbor seals can be spotted in quiet mornings. Their heads bob up in the glassy water and sometimes they would stare at me with large dark eyes before slipping effortlessly under the water again.

Seal Mother envisions a selkie in her seal form, swimming not too far offshore, watching her children from a distance. Lyrical melodic lines express her love and longing for her children, while undulating motives evoke currents of water and grief. The embellishments are inspired by Irish whistle ornamentation such as cuts and taps. The piece ends with a reinvention of the Scotts ballad The Great Selkie, a tragic folksong about a Selkie father and his son who are killed by humans while in seal form.

Seal Mother was commissioned by and is dedicated with love to Hal Ide and Rose Bishop.

she conjures

she conjures places us in 1666 in North Berwick, Scotland. Grissall's mother has been burned for witchcraft and a mysterious spell of endless snow has fallen upon the land. With the help of her mother's feathered familiar, Caraid, Grissall seeks answers and justice, with the help of a little magic of her own. This feminist tale of witches, crows, curses, revenge, and redemption is infused with Scottish folk music elements. The accented chords and stomping in the opening and closing of the cycle are inspired by Scottish Waulking songs. These are folk songs traditionally sung by women to the rhythmic beating of wet cloth, a process that helps tighten the weave and make it more water

proof. The songs frequently feature nonsense syllables, which inspires Grissall's repetitions of "na hiri hua," a cry for help and solace that goes beyond words.

she conjures was commissioned by Catalyst New Music for their Fuse: Collaborations in Song project and premiered by Claire McCahan, mezzo-soprano, and Brendon Shapiro, piano in February, 2023.

I. incantation

Mama,
Ye' left an echo
A beckon from beyond.
Incantation
on Mother's last breath
cast a spell of endless snow—
Freeze their wheat, no bread to eat!
Split a sail with hunks of hail!
An incantation
Endless snow...

Mama, accused of the unthinkable; a poppet of
Father! Poppets are Devil's work—why would
the
Magistrate blame my Mother? Perhaps he had
somethin' to do with it!
— I know! I'll fetch Mother's familiar. He can
crawl into his chimney and be my spy!

II. familiar

Hello Caraid!
I bet other crows get green-eyed when ye' come
inside!
Grissall extends her arm. Caraid perches, she
holds her arm in front of her so they can chat.
He looks for Mother
I'm sorry—
Yer Master, my Mother,
'as been burned alive.
Why?
When women 're born
from the rib of the land,
with their spirits,
mysterious as fog,
the men who hold gavels
hold daggers, hunt witches...
So, I'll be yer Master,
yer Mother now.

Listen closely, will ye' ?
Wing way to the Magistrate's House.
Perch on 'is chimney
then go, fly inside
as I cast a little spell—

III. conjuring

Hecate, come to me
Bella donna and bilberry
the flesh of fruit from a yew tree
Maiden, Mother, Crone
Grant me eyes of the crow

Ah, would ye' look at that...
Perched on the smoke shelf,
Perfect view!
He's hunched over
Closer, Caraid, Closer
Closer

There it is!
Now swoop down,
put that into his pocket!

IV. guilty

Everyone! Everyone, gather 'round! The
Magistrate 'as been doin' the Devil's bidding! He
accused my
Mother of keepin' poppets, while I know very
well he has one in his own coat pocket!

Ye' see!? Do you believe me now?

Yes! That's it!
Cast yer stones!
Let the blood of judgment
stain the snow!

The snow!
It's... stopped

Mama

No magic, no justice
Could restore what was stolen.

But oh, Ye wouldn't think—
hands that burn women
are stained with Devil's ink!

Song of the Forgotten Rose

A Wedding Poem by Sabrina Peña Young

Sabrina wrote to me that she composed this piece for her wedding. We love the mysterious beauty of the piece and the concept of finding love in nature.

–Lisa Neher

In the Garden of Life,
Midnight hid the Scarlet Rose.
Wilted and torn,
She cried to the heavens,
Petals upturned,
Imploring of God,
That Grace come down from the mountain.

In this land journeyed a stalwart traveler. Alone,
He had conquered roads forgotten.
This path had led him through
Hills and valleys.
His search for
Beauty.

God, Looking down upon creation,
Saw what they could not see.
Hope in the hands of the Great Orchestrator,
In the form of a rose and a man.

Buried, In the shadows,
The wanderer stumbled and fell
On roots he could not see.
Lying among weeds,
His eyes alighted on Beauty.

For there, near his outstretched hand, Shone a Rose in moon's pale gleam.
Tenderly he touched her tearstained petals.

A thousand lonely nights erased.
A thousand lonely nights erased in a single moment
Of Love's sweet embrace.